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Steven P. Hill

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STEVEN P. HILL

# The Soviet Film Today

*This article is based on close reading of the Russian film press during the past two years, plus a 50-day visit to the USSR and the Moscow Film Festival in the summer of 1965 — during which Mr. Hill visited film organizations, interviewed film-makers and critics, and saw 84 Soviet feature films in their domestic versions.*

*As Mr. Hill reports, modern Soviet cinema has a new interest for the world film audience, offering a growing variety and more outspoken treatment of subject-matter; Soviet film-makers are paying greater attention to technique and form, and the state is recognizing the film-makers' right to individual expression. Increased production, a tremendous influx of young people, and important economic and organizational reforms in the film industry make it likely that the Soviet film will again come to figure prominently in the world film scene.*

The real beginning of the Soviet artistic renaissance dates from the death of Stalin in 1953. The last two decades of his rule ("the period of the cult") had been marked by an extreme distrust of artists as citizens and even party members. Many film and theater people were arrested, such as writer Kapler; or executed, such as directors Meyerhold and Eggert, writers Tretiakov, Kurs, Kirshon, and Novokshonov, cameraman Nilsen, boy-actor Kyrilia from *Road to Life*, producer Piotrovsky, bureaucrat Shumiatsky. The cult period was also marked by distrust of artists as such: between 1935 and 1953 no fictional features (with one exception in 1947 by Schweitzer) were entrusted to beginning directors. All other big films were done by the officially sanctioned veterans working in the one officially sanctioned style of "socialist realism"—impersonal, large-scale, expensive, heavy-weight, didactic, glossy, cleaned-up historical and literary biographies and modern propaganda vehicles.

After Stalin's death, and particularly after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, which officially began the policy of de-Stalinization, a great many changes began to occur. Most of the purge victims

were gradually "rehabilitated"—even if posthumously—and their film credits were restored; moreover, policy statements now place great emphasis on "trust and belief in people." On the artistic level, production got rolling again, rising from six fiction features in 1951 and 18 in 1952, to 38 in 1954, 85 in 1956, 103 in 1958, 116 in 1964, 125 in 1965, and the same number scheduled for 1966 and for 1967,

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Citations from the Russian film press are abbreviated as follows: *IK*=*Iskusstvo kino* (thick monthly); *SE*=*Sovetsky ekran* (illustrated bi-monthly); *SK*=*Sovetskoe kino* (weekly newssheet); *SF*=*Sovetsky film* (illustrated export monthly).

including about 10 in "wide-format" (70mm), 45–50 in widescreen, and 40 in color, per year. To handle this big increase in production, a whole new wave of young (and not so young) Film Institute graduates rolled on to the scene, making less pretentious, sharper, and often rather outspoken films about real people, many of them (for a change) in modern Soviet settings, and including a number of comedies.

Among the front-runners who started in the "thaw" of 1954–58 were, chronologically, Vladimir Basov (a fast worker lacking artistic inspiration), Michael Schweitzer (specialist in ambitious literary adaptations like *Resurrection* and *Time Forward!*), Alov and Naumov (a team which likes tense, dynamic dramas in emotional style), Samson Samsonov (careful Chekhov adaptations like *The Grasshopper* and *Three Sisters*), Basil Ordynsky (war dramas), Eldar Riazanov (comedies and musicals, from *Carnival Night to Uncommon Thief*), Marlen Hutsiyev (an actor's director dedicated to modern "problem" dramas like *I Am 20* and *July Rain*), Siegel and Kulijanov (who have now split up and gone into fanciful comedy and historical drama, respectively), Tengiz Abuladze and Revaz Chkheidze (two Georgians who like neorealist stories of "little people"), Stanislav Rostotsky (who makes big pictures of various styles, like *Hero of Our Time*, prominently featuring beautiful actresses), Leonid Gaidai and Yuri Chuliukin (students of Alexandrov who inherited his knack for comedy, Gaidai in slapstick and Chuliukin in lyric comedy). All of these directors of the Soviet new wave, and several other lesser figures, were born in the 1920's, and all (except Schweitzer) made their first features between 1954 and 1958. Some of them began working in teams, as is the normal way for beginning Soviet directors; those who prove their ability are soon promoted to solo assignments.

The sixties have seen a continuation of this new wave, occasionally rising and falling according to zigs and zags in the party line—such as Khrushchev's attack on Hutsiyev's *I Am Twenty* in 1962–63, and the 1964 Central Committee admonition to Mosfilm studio. But in general the trend has been definitely upward, in quantity and variety of production, in continued infusion of new blood at various creative levels, in artistic freedom, in economic reform of the industry; in construction of new studios, studio and research facilities, and theaters; in the rise of important production centers in the union republics (Georgia, Lithuania, and so on), and in increasing western contacts (co-

productions and purchase of more western films).

Coinciding with the rise in quantity and variety of production—and to a considerable extent responsible for it—is a second youth movement which has given 108 director-graduates of the Film Institute their chance to make their first films in the last four years; there were 18 such debuts in 1964, and in 1965 26 more seniors in the directing class began shooting their degree films at various regular commercial studios around the country, especially in the union republics with less developed film industries. (This practice is being changed, with the construction of a new studio at the Film Institute where degree candidates will shoot their senior projects.) Plans for 1967 call for 30% of films to be directed by "debutants."

Indeed, a number of first films have gained prizes at various festivals: Michael Bogin's *Ballad of Love*, Andrew Konchalovsky-Mihalkov's *First Teacher*, Elem Klimov's *Welcome Kostia—or No Trespassing*, Michael Kobahidze's *The Wedding*, Paul Liubimov's *Auntie with the Violets*, Victor Lisakovich's documentaries *He Was Called Theodore* and *Katiusha*, writer-actor Basil Shukshin's *A Fellow Like That*, Peter Todorovsky's *Loyalty*, Larisa Shepitko's *Heat Wave*, and many lesser efforts, not to speak of Tarkovsky's still extremely powerful *My Name is Ivan* of a few years ago. In 1965 at the Lenfilm studio alone (second in the country after Mosfilm) there were eight directorial debuts. This tidal wave of young talent was celebrated by a special section of *Iskusstvo kino* (June 1965), which devoted 42 pages to verbal and photo portraits of some two dozen beginning film-makers and their initial works. This wave of the sixties is really the second Soviet new wave, consisting of young men and women in their middle and late twenties, who were small children during the war and only teen-agers when the Stalin era and the worst Cold War tensions ended. They can see the modern world with a fresh, unjaundiced eye, and have an interest in new means of expressing new themes, without the political and moral dogmatism of previous generations.

The Soviet youth movement is not restricted to directors: many young performers are also gaining attention, of whom the most in demand seem to be snub-nosed blonde Galina Polskikh (*Meet Me in Moscow, Once there Lived an Old Couple*); brunette Tamara Semina (*Resurrection, Day of Happiness*); Larisa Luzhina (just back from a dual role in an East German production); stage-trained Margaret Terekhova, who may become the Soviet Bette

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Davis (*Hello, It's Me!*); folksy Leonid Kuravlev (*A Fellow Like That, Your Son and Brother*); Stanislav Liubshin (*I am Twenty, Ballad of the Alps*); and *Ballad of a Soldier* hero Vladimir Ivashov and his piquant green-eyed wife Svetlana Svetlichnaya (now co-starred in the Lermontov classic *Hero of Our Time*).

There are a considerable number of second-generation film people among the youngsters, including the Vertinsky sisters, 21-year-old Anastasia (*Hamlet, War and Peace*) and Marianne (*I am Twenty*), daughters of the late cabaret singer Alexander; Victoria Fedorova (*Ballad of Love*), teenage daughter of veteran comedy actress Zoya; satirist Serge Mihalkov's handsome younger son Nikita (*Meet Me in Moscow, The Rolecall*) and his older son Andrew Konchalovsky-Mihalkov (who started as Tarkovsky's co-writer, assistant, and bit-player in *My Name is Ivan* and *Andrew Rublev*, and has now won independent recognition with *First Teacher*); Michael Kalatozov's son George, a Georgian cameraman of course (*White Caravan; I See the Sun*); two other Georgians, Eldar and George Shengelaya, director sons of old-time director Nicholas Shengelaya and actress Nata Vachnadze; Leningrad director Julius Fait, son of Kuleshov's old villain-player Andrew (*A Boy and A Girl*—the Soviet equivalent of *Blue Denim*); Arina Aleinikov, daughter of actor Peter (*Welcome Kostia*) and Sofiko Chiaureli, daughter of the old-time Stalinist director Michael Chiaureli and actress Veriko Anjaparidze (star of her father's new costume comedy-drama *Times are Different Now*—whose title may be more eloquent than intended). Other well-known names are borne by newcomers like Nicholas Dovzhenko from the Ukraine and the Georgian classic beauty Ariadne Shengelaya (*Garnet Bracelet*).

The directors of the newest generation of the middle 1960's are not to be confused with the first Soviet new wave—now actually the “middle generation”: Chukhrai, Hutsiyev, Siegel, Schweitzer, Gaidai, Samsonov, Alov and Naumov, Riazanov, Rostotsky, Kulijanov, Chuliukin, Igor Talankin, Vitautas Zhalakiaichus, Serge Parajanov. Born in the 1920's, the latter generation lost the whole decade of the forties fighting the war and the Stalinist artistic standstill which followed, broke into direction in the middle 1950's, and now, in their early or middle forties, are established producer-directors who are already assuming supervisory, administrative, and teaching duties: Kulijanov is head (“first secretary of the board”) of the increasingly power-



I AM CUBA

ful and independent Film Workers Union, Chukhrai heads the new Experimental Studio, Samsonov supervises production in the “Ekran” (actors’) subdivision of the huge Mosfilm studio, Talankin and Siegel teach directing courses at the Film Institute, Chuliukin despite bad health which limits his active work provides scripts and consultation to young directors like Bogin.

One might even speculate whether these additional responsibilities have not come on rather soon in life, when these men are still at the peak of their powers and are perhaps less inclined to work behind a desk than a camera (they do keep their hand in with a film about every three years). In any event, this situation was necessitated by the unusual circumstance that there was no generation of the 1940's, which would now be in line to assume a large share of executive, supervisory, and teaching duties. Thus there was a break in the continuity of artistic generations, a gap of almost twenty years (after Romm's debut in 1935, no young blood came into the film-directing ranks until after 1953), and the “middle generation” of the 1950's is now stepping in to fill this gap.

The older Soviet generations have been reduced by the deaths of writer Alexander Rzheshesvsky (1967); writer Boris Chirskov, Nicholas Cherkasov, and Vladimir Petrov (1966); Boris Barnet, Amo-Bek-Nazarov, documentarist Samuel Bubrik, and Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's widows (1965). Leonid Lukov (1963) Anatole Rybakov (1962), and Serge Vasiliev and Zachary Agranenko (1960), have now all passed sixty—at which birthday they are customarily congratulated in the press and named “People's Artist” (the top title) or “Meritorious Worker of the Arts.” It is true that several

venerable greats of the late 1920's and early 1930's, like Kalatozov, Heifitz, Yutkevich, Raizman, Kozintsev, Solntseva, Ermiler, Alexandrov, Roshal, Gerasimov, Donskoy, Pyriev, Karmen, Romm, Stroyeva, even the septagenarians Room and Chiaureli, are still relatively active, creating occasional major new features. Not all of these meet with critical success, however: the traditionalists Roshal, his wife Stroyeva, and Pyriev, plus Alexandrov, have all recently suffered at the hands of the press which did not care for their latest works—the Karl Marx biography *A Year Like Life*, the super-patriotic *We are the Russian People*, *Light of a Distant Star*, and *Lenin in Switzerland*, respectively. And in any case these senior citizens cannot be counted on for more than a few more years of active service. By 1975 the artistic reins of the Soviet film industry will be held entirely by the upcoming, liberal-minded middle generation of the 1950's.

With all this upsurge of production and personnel in the last dozen years, it is not surprising to find the new Soviet film industry has felt its share of growing pains. And in the freer atmosphere of the post-Stalin (and post-Khrushchev) period, defects are being discussed with plenty of plain speaking both at conferences and in the film press. The following pages will be devoted to a summary of these problem areas, after which it is fitting to look at the positive steps which are being undertaken.

The younger generation is not finding openings in at least one field: writing. There are constant complaints that graduates of the Film Institute's scenario department cannot get their screenplays accepted for production by the commercial studios—which prefer the work of tried-and-true writers. When there was one recent exception to this rule, Mosfilm's acceptance of the comedy *Children of Don Quixote* by Institute student Nina Fomina, a big to-do was made about it in the press; unfortunately, the completed film flopped. One critical article on the writing problem (SK 1/15/66) observed that script writers are the only graduates of the Institute who automatically become free lance and do not receive a regular position at one or another studio; the authors suggest creation of a "scenario workshop" with a team of staff writers at each studio. There has been discussion regarding the desirability of the old Hollywood assembly-line writing methods, with each script being the joint effort of a group of specialists (dialogue, plot construction, adaptation, etc.), but as yet this idea does not seem to have won many adherents. Pres-

ent practice finds veteran scenarists like Eugene Gabrilovich doing their scripts alone, while less experienced writers usually work in tandem; another very common occurrence is for the script to be credited jointly to the director and one or two writers. Another equally critical article (SK 11/20/65) mentioned by name several young script graduates who had gone into journalism, criticism, and TV, abandoning screen writing altogether after finding no outlet for their talents; it also pointed out the paradox that many directors at the Lenfilm studio are scenario graduates from Moscow who couldn't get work in their specialty and wound up directing in Leningrad. (See also SK 2/19/66.)

And Lenfilm is having its problems on the directing level too. Of the eight directorial debuts in 1965, none was a real success, and some were raked over the coals, such as Tregubovich's *Hot July* and Birman's *The Wreck*, two modern dramas dwelling heavily on the characters' confused love lives and sex problems. There was also considerable criticism of Kvinihidze's *First Visitor* and Olshvanger's *On One Planet*, two Lenin pictures entrusted to novices who evidently were not up to such an assignment. (So many Lenin and other big "historical-revolutionary" pictures are being prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of the Communist Revolution that the supply of directors to handle them has run thin; what a turnabout from 15 years ago, when all big prestige pictures had to be done by the established "masters," and no novice was even allowed to direct minor features!) At a recent Leningrad conference the complaint was also raised by veterans Kozintsev and Vengerov that the young film-makers are wrapped up only in their own films and are uninterested in community and studio matters ("inadequately manifest themselves in social and creative life"—SE '66.5:2). In Moscow, the second-largest studio (Gorky Studio of Children's and Young People's Films, formerly "Detfilm") was recently attacked by the press for letting through some very weak pictures, the worst of which, Sytina's ballet script *Everything is for You*, suffered from the fact that the star, Barabanova, was allowed to direct it herself. The head of the studio indicated in print that a "lesson had been learned" from this unsuccessful experiment.

Another area in which the youth movement is causing problems is in front of the camera: in fact, the so-called "actor problem" is getting considerable play in the press and at conferences. According to Mosfilm boss Surin, "much time is lost on

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the set because of actors' lateness. Woe to the director who has asked several theatrical actors to appear simultaneously for shooting. Getting them together exactly at the appointed time for shooting (not to speak of rehearsals) is almost impossible." (IK, '65.7:16). Another complaint is that youthful performers are being rushed into films without adequate training just because they have a fresh new face, and then are being type-cast in picture after picture. Following *Resurrection* Tamara Semina was offered a whole series of fallen-woman roles; Nina Menshikova has had eight parts, all of them weepy, pathetic women; Alexis Batalov gets no roles that offer him a new challenge except when he works for Heifitz.

Another complaint is that older performers, crowd favorites, are idle too much between parts. Alexandrov's wife, the aging musical-comedy star Liubov Orlova who had not been in much demand lately (her spouse's stock has also tumbled), recently wrote a plaintive little note in *Sovetskoe kino* (4/30/66) expressing a hope that she would find some interesting new role. The result of this two-pronged "actor problem" is that audiences keep asking when such-and-such an old favorite is going to be seen again, while some younger actors are feeling the lack of Institute training, and as they go along year after year playing the same parts, with little opportunity for development, in some cases are dropping out of sight (Serge Gurzo, V. Ivanov) or leaving films for the stage (Tatiana Piletskaya, Nina Doroshina).

These difficulties are to some extent inevitable anywhere in a director's medium like the cinema, but also are in part a peculiar Soviet inheritance from the "typage" and "model" theories of Russian silent films, when stars were replaced by director-controlled non-actors (Kuleshov recruited boxers and wrestlers to play cowboys and spies, Eisenstein workers and officers to play themselves). A very serious attempt is now being made in the USSR to give more attention and creative scope to the actor; many editorials and interviews with outspoken veteran players like Boris Andreyev dissect the actor problem while laudatory articles and increasingly glamorous cover photos attempt to build up actors as creative collaborators and to a degree even as star personalities. At a conference, Union head Leo Kulijanov and actor Michael Zharov pointed out that studio contracts are filled with clauses obligating the actor but there is practically nothing which obligates the studio; Kulijanov went on to suggest that perhaps per-



THE ENCHANTED RIVER DESNA

formers should have the right to view rushes and to collaborate in the selection of the best take of each scene, etc. Whether this will transpire remains to be seen.

Color remains a headache, and some Soviet studio bosses, like Surin (see IK '65.7:20-1) find themselves caught in a curious squeeze play between the demands of the very powerful Federal Cinema Committee (Goskomitet), which "plans" more color films, and the reluctance of directors and cameramen, who prefer the artistic advantages of good black-and-white over bad color. Abraham Room's 1964 *Garnet Bracelet* (a big box office hit, in color) shows the aesthetic difficulties: among other odd tints, the faces often come out greenish, which is particularly unbecoming to a beautiful star like Ariadne Shengelaya in the lead role. In general the film-makers seem to be holding out against administrative pressure to use color, as statistics indicate the annual number of color features dropped from 52 (1963) and 55 (1964) to only 40 (1965) and 41 (1966). Evidently artistic progress in using color is being made, however, especially in some of the union republics, such as the Ukraine studio's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* and the White-Russian studio's *City of Master Craftsmen*. (Another sore spot about color, which is also felt in America, is that 16mm reduction prints from color negatives are made in the USSR with a process that inadequately reproduces the sound track. The result is that 16mm prints of *The Forty-First*, for example, have bad sound in the USA.)

A more basic difficulty which has always plagued the Soviet film industry, and all of Russia's other industries, as well as agriculture, is a tendency to slow, poorly organized, expensive production methods. This was one of the reasons that the Central Committee issued its decree in May, 1964,

admonishing Mosfilm, among other things, to improve its "productive and financial discipline." As Surin himself admitted, "almost all the big studios of the world have higher productivity of labor in their film crews than we do" (*IK* '65.7:17). The same thing was also admitted by Union head Kulijanov: "We lack production knowledge, the know-how to organize work, to value our own and others' time, to watch the people's money. Some of our film crews, if you were to time their work, could serve as a model of sloppiness. I assure you not one capitalist producer would stand for what you and I sometimes allow ourselves. Why, we have made clichés out of expressions like 'who are we waiting for now?' and 'in pictures nobody ought to be late.'" (Report to the Constituent Assembly of the Film Workers Union, Nov. '65, p. xxi).

Gregory Chukhrai, the leader of the economic reform movement (more on this below), is one of the harshest critics of the existing system. "When I first came to Mosfilm as a young man, I was struck by a poster reading 'Disgrace and shame on Dovzhenko's production, which is 2130 usable feet behind schedule.' But never did I see—either at Mosfilm or at other studios of the country—a poster reading 'Disgrace and shame on such-and-such a production. Its film didn't run more than two days on the screen.' Meanwhile such films have come out and continue to do so. Very many of them don't pay the cost of producing, printing, and distributing them. The public refuses to watch them. They are a failure, economically and ideologically. The fact is that today studio economics is completely separated from distribution economics. It's important for the studio to meet the schedule [lit., 'fill the plan'], to release a certain number of items, but the subsequent fate of its films doesn't concern it. . . . Let's say a film is brought in ahead of schedule and has a saving. But in distribution it sometimes doesn't even cover the expenses invested in it. The country suffers huge losses. . . . An analysis of existing economic interrelations shows that releasing bad, lackluster pictures under the present system is not only not dangerous, but sometimes even profitable. Profitable for the studio and for the authors of the film." (*SK* 3/19/66).

In another interview Chukhrai tells another revealing story about the existing system: "Once, when I was working on a shooting script, the producer asked me to write in some extra process shots. So as to get additional money, film, and,

mainly, to prolong the shooting schedule. 'But I don't need a process shot here. Who would I be fooling? Myself? The Country?' I refused. Nonetheless, they of course cut my budget with the usual distrustful notation: 'You always overestimate. . . .' My honesty turned against me and, mainly, against the production. Meditating about that, I began to notice that our film production system now and then pushes people into lying. Otherwise you'll lose out." (*SE* '66.3:1). Plenty of concrete figures to back up these complaints are given in the article "Great Changes are Needed" (*IK* '65.7:13-22) by Mosfilm boss Surin, who mentions by name many specific examples of films which ran far over schedule (and budget); which overestimated their footage; which had to do retakes or make synchronizing changes after the sets were taken down or the actors departed, due to the insistence of the studio's artistic council or the government watchdog committee. Surin also complains that associate producers currently lack authority to set ceilings on budgets, conclude contracts with writers and actors beyond a certain maximum, and so on.

One gets the impression that Soviet film-makers and studios wouldn't mind a bit less control from the watchdog Committee, even though that control has been tremendously relaxed since the complete tyranny of the Stalin years, when, "as we all know very well, we had one critic for the whole country, who gave the final rating to every new film" (Kulijanov, *IK* '65.7:9). Compared to Stalin and his henchmen, the Khrushchev administration (1955-64) was a great blessing—although sometimes a mixed one, as Khrushchev's erratic policies towards the arts fluctuated from hot to cold as quickly as the winds of internal politics, international relations, and his own peasant background, suspicion of intellectuals, and subjective whims carried him from a "liberalizing" to a "reactionary" position and back again. (These shifts of policy from encouragement to condemnation were highly publicized in the case of poet Eugene Evtushenko.) In the opening line of Film Union secretary Alexander Karaganov's description of the 1966 Party Congress—"the delegates' *calm, business-like, scientific, and analytic* approach to the discussion and solution of problems. . . ." (*SE* '66.12:2; italics mine)—there is an unmistakable reference to the uncertainties of the arts under Khrushchev, whose methods were often anything but businesslike or scientific.

In Khrushchev's last years the most publicized case of blatant interference in films from upstairs was Hutsiyeu's Antonioniesque *I am Twenty*, whose original script was published in *IK* back in 1961 under the title *Ilyich's Gate*. The completed film was previewed and slammed by Khrushchev at the time of his attacks on abstract painters, Evtushenko, and others, from December 1962 to April 1963. The film was then held up and Hutsiyeu had to spend another year and a half or more making changes. It finally came out shortly after Khrushchev's downfall, in January 1965; ironically, the "ghost" scene at which Khrushchev was particularly miffed stayed in the film after all! Another much publicized case was the 1963 Moscow Film Festival, where the USSR entered the mediocre, stereotyped *Meet Baluyev* from Lenfilm. *Baluyev* was far outclassed by foreign competition like Fellini's *8½*, to which the jury was able to vote the Grand Prize only after the Soviet jury members evidently did some fast backroom wheeling and dealing to overrule a veto of the Fellini film from upstairs. The whole affair was a serious embarrassment to Soviet film-makers, among whom Kulijanov admits "the very name *Meet Baluyev* has already become odious."

The most recent case of evident political bungling in cinema circles coming to my attention involves the Ukrainian documentary *Beautiful Flights of Soul*, about an art gallery organized by amateurs

in a Ukrainian village. Harsh press criticism of the released film led to the disclosure that this was the fourth version, after successive re-editing and -narrating of three earlier ones had taken out the "rough spots"—which included an argument with the head of the village club who "doesn't care much for art." Some schoolgirls' uneasy discussion around a nude Venus, and off-hand remarks by gallery assistants about their summer work on a pig farm. The film in its original form had reality and freshness, and was okayed by the studio, but then was vetoed by the Ukraine Film Ministry's censorship board [redkollegia]—"and at its insistence the long process of 'improving' took place" (*SE* '66.8:14; '66.20:19).

Among the first goals formulated by the Union of Film Workers in November 1965 was the "further development of participation from below in the practice of reviewing scripts and finished films, the inclusion in script censorship boards of representatives of the creative professions—script-writers, critics, directors . . . freeing the studios of excessive, petty supervision, and granting them greater independence in solving artistic and production problems" (*IK* '66.1:2-3). These are praiseworthy goals—let us hope they can be achieved.

The USSR is experiencing some growing pains in film exhibition as well as production. The increasing number of films "in two parts" [v dvukh

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seriakh] makes headaches for exhibitors and viewers; these films usually run a total of three to four hours, with a five-minute intermission in the middle, and with separate tickets for the two "parts" each costing the normal amount for a regular feature (about half a ruble or fifty cents officially). Even though there are separate tickets, you have to buy both at the beginning, and if you don't like the part one, you are still stuck for the cost of part two. There is even a tendency among exhibitors to cut out the intermission, which makes showings run rather long. Exhibitors complain that the public has trouble finding four hours free in a block, so that attendance "is less even for a good two-part than for an average one-part film" (SK 6/25/66).

There is a suspicion that some film-makers and studios may like two-part films for fiscal reasons: a 100-minute film, for instance, will run in one part and pay the normal compensation, but stretching it to 150-160 minutes will make possible its division into two parts with a resulting increase in budget and hopefully twice the box-office take. Whatever the reasons in the case of Chukhrai's disappointing *Once There Lived an Old Couple*, it was unanimously agreed that the film was far too long and drawn-out for its subject matter—a criticism of new films appearing rather frequently in the Soviet press nowadays. Samson Samsonov is one director, however, who refuses to make two-part films and even did his monumental *Optimistic Tragedy* in one.

Another problem for exhibitors is the lack of films made specifically for children—a contrast with Stalin's worst years, when the opposite complaint could have been made. The Gorky Studio in Moscow has been split into two halves, one making pictures for teen-agers and adults, the other, so-called children's half "making pictures which children under 16 shouldn't always see" (SK 5/7/66).

Some of the blame for difficulties with children's films can also be laid elsewhere, according to Kulijanov: "Can we play [children's films] as we should with the existing system of distribution? Unfortunately, no. For here the financial plan comes into its own—as you know, you can't meet it with audiences of children. Nominally there exist some children's theaters in Moscow, but they are both limited in number and poor" (report to the Constituent Assembly, p. xxiv).

Serious questions about distribution and exhibition have been raised in the last two years, partly provoked by the weak box-office records of "modern," "difficult," critically praised films like *I am*

*Twenty* and Konchalovsky's *First Teacher*, and even modern satiric comedies like Danelia's 33 and Klimov's *Adventures of a Dentist*—which the Film Union charged were unenthusiastically exploited in some parts of the USSR. A collaborative inquiry in IK ('65.2:89-91) revealed that bookings are determined in various districts at strictly secret meetings of local theater managers with regional distribution representatives, "whose personal tastes are not always irreproachable." The contributors to the inquiry call into question the box-office results of such a system: *Mysteries of Paris* with Jean Marais, for example, was booked over Kulijanov's Lenin film *Blue Notebook* by a three-to-one margin in Vladimir ("hence the disparity in attendance figures"), and *Three Musketeers* set a new attendance record there, according to a critic, only because "it was forced on the spectators by the distribution office . . . and it does not characterize the artistic demands of Vladimir viewers. They watched what they were shown most."

The general conclusion of the inquiry is that the personal tastes of distributors and exhibitors currently play almost a life-and-death role in determining the fate of new films. Beyond its intrinsic interest, this inquiry is also very significant in revealing a growing concern of film-makers about the commercial fate of their own films; traditionally film production and its compensation has been completely separated from these areas. Even at the present time a director of highly lucrative comedies like Leonid Gaidai in an interview with the present writer seemed to know very little about the box-office take on his own pictures. Kulijanov says that "the question of a film's fate in distribution is so important that it is expedient to create a special commission of creative workers and distributors, which would study this question and provide smart, businesslike assistance to film distribution" (report to the Constituent Assembly, p. XXIV).

All of the foregoing production, distribution, and exhibition difficulties need to be seen in the light of major changes and improvements which are being made, especially through the efforts of the increasingly important Film Workers Union (SRK). Formed in June 1957 and now headed by 43-year-old director Leo Kulijanov and critic-editor Alexander Karaganov, their organization encompasses all film workers in the USSR, and was formed on their initiative, with much of its impetus coming from below. The Organizing Committee of the Union held around a dozen plenary sessions between 1957 and November 23-26, 1965, when it

summoned the First Constituent Assembly of the Union.\* This very significant meeting, whose opening speech was given, in the presence of Brezhnev and Kosygin, by Kuleshov (a nice tribute to a much-neglected film pioneer, now 68 and in poor health) was chaired by Kulijanov, held four days of sessions, and discussed and accepted a Charter.

It also elected a board of governors and a secretariat, which will carry on the Union's activities between plenary sessions and actually make most of the important policy decisions. Plenty of big names, many "liberals" among them, were elected to the secretariat, including Hutsiyev, Chukhrai, and Kalatozov; and some conservatives too, like Gerasimov. But there were some more conservative figures who *didn't* make the secretariat: Ermler, Donskoy, administrators Novogrudsky and Groshev (for the full membership of the governing board and the secretariat, see SK '65.151:2).

This Union is important in the structure of Soviet cinema not only because it was formed on the initiative of the film-makers themselves, but also because it seems to be more than a paper organization. It has a regularly functioning board, housed in the newly enlarged Central House of Cinema on Vasilievskaya Street, and is a force to be reckoned with in the subsequent development of Soviet films—a force which now seems in a position to do some good old-fashioned lobbying when it feels its efforts are being interfered with by overzealous administrators and censors, poorly presented by careless exhibitors, or unjustly reviewed by biased critics.

The Constituent Assembly at the end of its deliberations passed a resolution outlining the Union's goals, which include "creating favorable

conditions for the artist to manifest his creative *individuality*; . . . further development of cinema in all the union republics; . . . stimulating in every way gifted writers to come into cinema; . . . improving and simplifying the system of reviewing and approving scripts [and] including representatives of the creative professions on censorship boards; . . . organizing scenario workshops at the studios and creating an all-union [national] scenario studio, which will be a creative laboratory for creating new scripts, a school for new staffs of screen writers; . . . reviewing the form of actors' contracts in the direction of expanding actors' rights. . . . The economic structure of our film production and the organization of the creative process are outdated in many respects and await immediate revision . . . Totally insufficient schedules are set up for creative preparations for making a film [i.e., script and rehearsals] and for its editing and synchronizing completion . . . while the most expensive part, the shooting schedule, is extremely drawn-out; . . . organizing an all-union film research center and a movie museum; . . . creation of a special newspaper [along the lines of the American 'trades']; . . . creation of specialized theaters; . . . development of research on spectators' perceptions of films and their wants . . ." (IK '66.1:1-4).

The resolution also devotes two full paragraphs to ways of improving the documentary, newsreel, and TV news fields, which currently leave extremely much to be desired. The text of this resolution is not merely "wishful thinking" (an expression used critically by many speakers at the Assembly, in obvious reference to Khrushchev's fanciful economic and agricultural schemes), but presents concrete steps which the Union is working to accomplish. Some already have been: one of the Union's next plenary sessions (January 1967) was devoted entirely to film production in the union republics, which have recently been sent a number of bright new Institute graduates who used their facilities to come up with very fine films like Bogin's *Ballad of Love* (Latvia) and Konchalovsky's *First Teacher* (Kirghiz). The highest-rated young playwright of recent years, Alexander Volodin, has recently switched to film writing; the government has approved the construction of a National Film Center containing a movie museum, research departments, a section for audience research, film library, and publications library, thus affording film critics and researchers a central place to work, with viewing halls, editing rooms with viewing apparatus, and so on.

\*Soviet hobby groups like the stamp collectors and the film societies are also in the process of forming loose nationwide federations. The film societies, which held their first national get-acquainted and planning meeting in the fall of 1965, are borrowing freely from the experience of their Polish and Czech colleagues, who got a ten-year head start over the Russians in the film-society movement. Significantly, much of the initiative in all these new, post-Khrushchev organizing movements in the USSR is coming from below, from individual hobbyists and local groups who want to meet and exchange information and advice with fellow-thinkers, and to make their wants known on a national level. Such a development would hardly have been conceivable under Stalin, who distrusted any manifestations of individual initiative or creativity, and preferred to bestow any such organizations (which existed mostly on paper) from the top.

The point about film-makers being encouraged to "manifest their creative individualities" may seem less tangible, but the statement is very meaningful in principle, and there is plenty of verbal support for the idea, "for creative experiments and innovations, personal initiative, the individual inclinations of the artist, a multitude of forms, styles, and genres" (SE '65.24:2). The old Stalinist ideal of regimented artists producing standardized, conformist, impersonal works in a single officially sanctioned prosaic style ("socialist realism"), with no room for any formal experiments or any criticism or skepticism, is now becoming a thing of the past, and is giving way to the ideal of the author's cinema (*cinéma d'auteur*), with each creator making pictures expressing his own outlook and in his own stylistic manner.

With this recognition of the film-maker's individuality, and of the desirability of a variety of styles and themes, comes a corresponding recognition of the variety of audiences which are taking shape, audiences for different genres of pictures. Considerable work is being started in the field of audience research (often referred to as "sociology" by Soviet liberals)—to determine objectively and for the first time what spectators' tastes and preferences really are. (Under Stalin and even until the beginning of the 1960's, the powers-that-be decided what was good for people, without bothering to check their opinions—"bourgeois sociology" was taboo.)

Russian film scholars interested in this field are beginning to discover and play with statistical methods like a new, still rather unfamiliar gadget, but they are already coming up with very interesting results. In this connection it was fascinating to see the publication in *IK* (1966.8), perhaps for the first time, of some concrete attendance statistics on features shown in the USSR in the first quarter of 1966. (By far the most-attended film was Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*).

One of the most interesting and ambitious projects is the annual best-film poll ("readers' contest") conducted by *Sovetsky ekran*, which is edited by one of the leading liberals, Dmitry S. Pisarevsky. The 1965 year-end issue of *SE* included an elaborate three-page fold-and-mail questionnaire. Questions included "how old are you," "how many 1965 films did you see (and how many on TV)," "which sections do you like in our magazine," "name your five best and five worst films of the year," "the last time you went to the movies, what made you decide to go," "in *I am Twenty*, were you inter-

ested in the characters' meditations about the meaning of life," and so on. Over 40,000 replies were received, and the basic categories (best and worst films, most popular performers) were tabulated later in the year (SE '66.10:1). But it appears that much of the secondary data never did get processed—perhaps because punchcards and IBM machines are not yet as widely used in the USSR as here. At any rate, the new questionnaire appearing in the last 1966 issue was considerably simplified and organized for better tabulating (an added question: "your favorite film of all time"), and dropped all questions about the readers' attitude to the journal itself.

In addition to *SE*, the Bureau for the popularization of Soviet Film Art has a new audience-research section, headed by F. Volkov, which conducted a poll during the 1966 All-Union Film Festival in Kiev (equivalent to the American "Oscar" competition), having viewers rate films on a five-point scale (numerical averages were published in *SK*, 6/11/66, for comparison with the official festival award winners). The degree of agreement between the official awards and the audience poll was striking, but it should be kept in mind that the competition was limited to two dozen features submitted by the studios themselves.

These various audience-research projects have important implications for film exhibition and production, for once the data from some of these polls establish that there are different audiences for different kinds of pictures, it is not a far step to using the data to help determine the production schedules of studios and the bookings of theaters, in response to spectators' tastes and wants. The old idea of a monolithic audience (for Stalin, everything in the USSR was "monolithic"), a single, undifferentiated mass-viewer, a kind of lowest common denominator, at which every film was aimed according to a standard recipe developed at the top, is now being seriously questioned. For instance, Kulijanov writes, "Our film industry works without really reacting to a composite picture of the audience and statistical data about its demands, wants inclinations, and enthusiasms. Among us the legend of the average viewer, abstract and impersonal, has proved very long-lived, and has given birth to conclusions such as "the people won't get it," "the public doesn't like it," (report to the Constituent Assembly, p. xxiv).

A very progressive distribution executive, G. Tomilov, deputy regional director of distribution in Sverdlovsk, comes to a similar conclusion, based

on results of his audience research (conducted since 1963): "Isn't it time to grasp that the demand that *each film be shown to each spectator* definitely ought to be revised, because [our] polls prove that *each film has its own audience*, and it would be more sensible to proceed from that proposition. In fact, is it even realistic that each active moviegoer would see all 120 domestic films in the year? Why, that would necessitate going to the movies a minimum of twice a week! And how many foreign pictures are released on top of that [exactly 100 in 1966]! On the other hand, even if such a miracle would happen, our theater chains would not be able to accommodate such a large number of spectators. But something else is realistic: the 120 Soviet pictures can be broken down into groups by figuring how each of the groups would serve the *highest possible* number of spectators for it. And in order to determine where to send what film, what audience is anxiously awaiting it, a serious and profound study of the interests and tastes of spectators is precisely what is needed. . . . It only remains to regret that a considerable number of our films are made for some kind of 'average' spectator, who doesn't exist in nature." (SK 6/25/66:2; *italics* Tomilov's).

This new concept of differentiated audiences is beginning to be reflected in the creation of some specialized theaters in the major cities. For years the USSR has had a number of specialized children's theaters—although they are not too numerous. In addition, Moscow has for some time had the "Revival Theater" [Teatr povtornogo fil'ma], which specializes in older pictures of the 1930's and 1940's, even an occasional silent; and in 1962-63 at the suggestion of Kalatozov, Evtushenko, and critic Weisfeld a special art theater "Screen" [Ekran] was established to show foreign and other fare of interest to a more limited audience. The "Metropole" in Moscow and the Moscow University Student Union, both downtown, show many foreign films, the majority from the Soviet bloc, although almost all are dubbed into Russian. And in 1966 three new specialized theaters were opened, the Theater of Good Films (Leningrad's first art house, established at the suggestion of one of the city's leading film clubs), and two in Moscow, "The Wick" (specialty: comedies) and "The Illusion" (regular showings of treasures from Gosfilmofond's previously little-seen archives).

This recognition of the audience as a consumer is also supported by Victor Orlov, a critic—and not always one of the most liberal ones, at that—in a

chatty article entitled "Different Kinds of Art are Needed!": "... the whole point is, evidently, what does a person today expect from a picture? And he, by the way has the right to expect what he wants. We should not forget about a simple truth: he is a consumer. Yes, yes, a consumer—or, if you wish, a customer—and there's nothing shameful or offensive about that for honorable film maestros. The spectator goes to the movies, pays for the movies, and it is his countless 50-cent [kopeck] pieces which add up to millions of film income. And a customer has the right to DEMAND. . . . The spectator expects DIFFERENT THINGS from art. Have you ever wondered why great people of the past loved, for instance, to read detective stories? . . . Why did Alexander Blok [pre-revolutionary highbrow poet] adore going to cheap movies and clipping pictures from magazines? . . . Why, even melodramas are good. Who would ever, for example, say anything against the noble American film melodrama *Camille* or against *Waterloo Bridge*? Or against the Soviet *Flesh and Blood* [1964, a real tearjerker by Yershov]? And comedies, even the 'funniest,' as it happens, aren't lacking in some deeper meaning—let's say, the recent [Soviet release: 1965] British [sic] movie *To Be or Not to Be*, the American *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Or the Soviet *Operation Laughter and Other Adventures of Shurick* . . . We can ask the masters: do you think that all the wealth of forms and genres can be laid in two Procrustean beds—'social drama' and 'lyric comedy'? What's the matter, are you ashamed of other genres? Why didn't you learn how 'to make movies'—the most diverse, varicolored, and enjoyable?" (SE '66.8:19).

As the above indicates, there is a growing acceptance of a variety of genres. According to one review of a bad Russian science-fiction film (*Engineer Garin's Death Ray*), "People are starved for film spectacles, . . . they want to see fantasy films and adventure films on the screen. . . . *There is no second-class art*. Let us recall that Nekrasov and Chekhov [nineteenth-century "serious" writers] wrote skits, that Wells's fantasy novels are great literature, and that Jules Verne's books are classics. So why aren't film masters really attracted by those genres of art in which boldness, resourcefulness, and courage are glorified—why do they refuse adventure and fantasy films?" (SE '66.2:5; *italics* mine). Some leading critics like Vartanov came out with a similar defense of the genre of slapstick or wacky comedy [eccentriada] after Gaidai's *Operation Laughter* (by all odds the greatest



OPERATION LAUGHTER: Gaidai on the set with Alexis Smirnov

Soviet visual comedy in thirty years) was misunderstood and even called “uncultured” or “silly” by many spectators—who probably hadn’t seen much real slapstick since Alexandrov’s work in the 1930’s.

The past neglect of these genres is rapidly being remedied, although as yet the directors who are venturing into previously unexplored territory are mostly beginners who are experiencing rather mixed success. The proven masters, other than younger ones like Gaidai and Riazanov (comedy) and Tarkovsky (who has lined up the science-fiction story *Solaris*) have not as yet shown too much inclination to depart from the psychological genres traditionally associated with Russian literature and drama. Probably one of the major reasons for the big names’ past neglect of adventure, farce, and sci-fi is the current system of compensating directors according to “artistic-ideological ratings” given from above; the “serious” genres automatically rate higher with the powers that be, and so a good “light” movie has little chance of equalling a good “heavy” film in the system of ratings and bonuses, so long as this system is divorced from box-office results. And this is one of the aims of the economic reforms now being advocated: to tie compensation to the box office in such a way that the major directors will be encouraged to go into comedy, adventure, sci-fi, espionage.

This brings up the hottest topic of discussion in the whole proposed economic reform of Soviet cinema—how to incorporate into film production the principle of “material stimulation” or “material interest,” as officially recommended by the September 1965 Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee. The new Brezhnev-Kosygin government has moved slowly and carefully to replace

## SOVIET FILM

Krushchev’s “wishful thinking” and his “spur-of-the moment” schemes with a “rational,” objective, “scientific” solution to the nation’s economic woes, and is now encouraging various branches of the economy to experiment with the idea recommended a few years ago (in the USSR, that is) by Prof. Yevsei Lieberman—namely, the profit motive—or, as it is known in current Soviet economic parlance, “material interest” [material ‘naya zainteressovanost’].

The proposed reform is now being seriously discussed in film circles, cautiously considered by some, such as Surin of Mosfilm, most enthusiastically championed by others—such as I. Bitz, a Mosfilm associate producer, who says “I have been in pictures fifteen years. In that time more than once we have made attempts to improve the system of production. They all began with the words ‘for the purpose of a further upsurge...’ But no upsurge happened. The main thing was lacking—a scientific, economic stimulation of production. The attempts proceeded from subjective conceptions, rather than from economically-based facts. The main problem is not to fire a bad producer and replace him with a good one, but to create conditions such as would cause the whole enormous staff of the studio and each person individually to put all his efforts into the work. And this is the wisdom of the September [1965] Plenary Session’s decisions. Then it will be apparent at once who is a good worker and who isn’t. This new system will influence the quality of films. We get rid of subjective evaluations of pictures by various commissions and we give the artist and the studio this alternative: make a good picture—you’ll get paid; don’t make one—and you won’t.” (SE ’66.6:3).

These potentially far-reaching changes are not only being discussed, but are also being given a practical test through the operation of the new Experimental Studio (“ETK”—Eksperimental’naya tvorcheskaya kinostudija), which was set up in the last half of 1965 through the efforts of Gregory Chukhrai, the new studio’s artistic supervisor, and Vladimir Pozner, its executive producer and a former Hollywood screen writer. The new studio, which is experimental only in the economic sense, existed mostly on paper until the September Plenary Session gave it the full go-ahead. It is operating under the Federal Cinema Committee, which along with the Ministry of Finance and the Government Committee on Labor and Wages is closely following its operations and accomplishments, so that “everything positive, accumulated through the experience

of the Experimental Studio, will be extended to the entire film industry" (SE '66.6:3). No wonder there is so much discussion and interest among all film workers in the reforms under consideration and trial.

The Experimental Studio differs from other Soviet studios in a number of ways. Like United Artists (with which Pozner was doubtless acquainted while in the USA), it has no studio facilities and will rent sets, hire workshops, labs, and so on, as the need arises, thus cutting overhead and "saving creative workers from excessive technical work, freeing them from unproductive waste of effort and time..." (Chukhrai, SK 3/19/66). It has no permanent staff except for production executives, economists, and script editors. All directors, cameramen, art directors, and actors will be hired on one-picture contracts pegged to the box-office record of the pictures. This is a real change from the current Soviet system, whereby directors, cameramen, actors, and others are more or less "on tenure" [v shtate] at a given studio, and are paid every month whether working or not (roughly the equivalent of the old Hollywood "contract directors" or "contract players," but who also get "bonuses" for highly rated films. Chukhrai says that "as a result of this [change], a director will go to work making a film not because he is on tenure and mustn't be idle, but because he has something to say to people in his new production. All this allows us to fight against the overstaffing which takes place under the existing system" (SK 3/19/66).

Another innovation involves bringing in efficiency experts to conduct operations analysis on all aspects of film production. Along the same lines, the studio will experiment with the method of having scenarios written directly in script form rather than in the current "literary form," like a short story—which the director then has to rewrite to make the shooting script. The existing method of budgeting and scheduling production will be changed: "The studio intends to cut down on shooting schedules. At the same time we will lengthen the time for preparation for filming and for working out the shooting script. Also the number of shooting days in the month will be increased, and the time set aside for editing. Let the editing of a film last three months, and not 35 days, as it does now" (Pozner). "Our shooting schedules [in elapsed time] will be reasonably restricted, because each day of shooting is connected with enormous expense, with the use of productive studio space,

services, and apparatus. On the other hand, the length of the editing and re-recording period will be practically unlimited. A day in the editing and re-recording period costs very little, but the effect in artistic terms can be very big" (Chukhrai).

The methods of compensation at the Experimental Studio will be quite different too. In Chukhrai's words, "our studio has given up every type of artistic and efficiency bonus. . . . Our studio's profit will be formed from a percentage of [the film's] distribution, which will correspond not to the film's commercial success, but to its use [i.e., commercial success corrected by an "ideological-artistic" factor]. However, this percentage from distribution will not begin to come to the studio until the film proves profitable for the government. In the same way, the enterprise's profitability will be regulated. If a film is unprofitable for the government, it is unprofitable for the studio too, and for every studio worker. But if the film brings in a profit, then the studio gets a profit too, which goes for expanding the volume of production as well as for compensating all the studio's workers without exception" (Chukhrai, SE 3/19/66).

The new system of payment, as stated in *Izvestia*, will be based on three factors: ideological-artistic level (a carry-over from the current system of bonuses), the number of spectators seeing the film, and the number of countries buying it. One would expect that cost of production would also be included in some form. The first factor is determined by a government commission which gives the film a rating; according to Chukhrai, "we consider that the Commission should first answer the question, is the given film from the aesthetic and political standpoints 'very necessary,' 'necessary,' or 'permissible'? And then this will automatically be subject to a correction for the opinion of spectators, the community, and the press, let's say, during the first three months the film is in distribution. In a year you can determine the level of its effect 'per capita.' If a film rated excellent by the Commission plays in half-empty halls, that means its level of effect is not great, and the pay for this film should be likewise." Pozner goes on to say that the new system "materially affects the quality of production. No 'indicators' will save us if the studio treasury is out of money and there is nothing to shoot future films on. The studio Charter has the following note: if it turns out that the cause of the studio's going bankrupt is a bad executive, the government cannot give it an additional loan until the studio administration has been replaced" (SE '66.3:1).

According to Chukhrai, the Experimental Studio will not specialize in any one type of film, but will encourage all genres: "In making diverse types of films, we will try to see that all of them interest the public without regard for genre" (SE '66.3:1). Some have expressed a fear about the new system of compensation: it is possible that light-weight, crowd-pleasing pictures whether good or bad will rake in all the chips for their authors, simply because audiences will go to any comedy, any adventure film, etc., due to the extreme shortage of them in the past. Proof that this sort of thing can happen even in enlightened, "non-bourgeois" countries is the fact that the biggest Soviet domestic attraction in recent years has not been *Ballad of a Soldier*, nor *Nine Days of One Year*, nor *Hamlet*, nor *Kolkhoz Chairman*, nor any other big prize-winner, but rather an artistically insignificant sci-fi movie starring Anastasia Vertinsky, *The Amphibian Man* (SE '65.22:7). So the thinking is that the general formula of paying films according to their box-office return, the number of countries buying them, and their preliminary "ideological-artistic" rating, may also need to be corrected by a factor of the popularity of the given genre, so that a film would need to exceed the average attendance in its own genre in order to rate well for financial return.

The opposite problem is also conceivable: a "difficult" film, one that is innovating and artistically experimental, may make a weaker showing at the box office, particularly when it first goes into release. The specific instances of *Ballad of a Soldier* and *Cranes are Flying* were cited in one discussion: both started very slowly (in the USSR), but after a half-year or so began to come into their own, and were still going strong in the second year. In the long run they drew extremely well. The thinking here is that "if it is an experiment for experiment's sake and the public doesn't accept and understand it, small compensation is proper. [But] if an experimental and innovating production en-

riches the language of the cinema, improves its form, if these are experiments in the interests of the public and [this is a very big "and"] are accepted by it, the new system will especially stimulate such experiments. . . . It not rarely happens that an innovating film does not immediately find wide approval and understanding. On the other hand, such films as a rule live longer. . . . For such films the period for determining their success with the public can be extended." (Yegorov and Semenov, SE '66.6:3; the peculiar logic and rosy optimism of some of the above quotations is not necessarily shared by me.—S.H.) Evidently an experimental film will still need to find its audience sooner or later, or its makers will feel the pinch; but this is the way things have always been in the past—and, it should be emphasized, not only in the homeland of Lenin—so no condolences are in order.

It is obvious that there are still plenty of bugs to be worked out of the new system, but given the enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work of Chukhrai and his associates at the Experimental Studio, one feels they have good chances for success. The Experimental Studio's first production is *Neither Adding nor Omitting* . . ., with Basil Ordynsky directing Simonov's script about the Battle of Moscow in late 1941. The authors emphasize that they are attempting an exact, factual reconstruction of that terrible fall and winter, when the Soviets were losing on all fronts and made a desperate attempt to save their capital from the previously unstoppable invaders. Both Ordynsky, with *At Your Threshold*, and Simonov, with *Living and the Dead*, have recently done important war films in a realistic manner emphasizing Soviet weaknesses and mistakes. Much different will be the Studio's second effort, Alexander Volodin's original script *The Enigmatic Hindu*, an eccentric story about a nonconformist vaudeville magician, to be directed by Peter Todorovsky (winner of a minor Venice prize in 1965 for *Loyalty*).

Another addition to the Soviet lineup of studios is the newly organized studio at the Film Institute (VGIK), where all Institute students will be able to do their diploma films. Given the number of interesting young film-makers in the USSR who are coming along with something new to say in new ways, we can expect to see many artistically worthy pictures coming from the Institute, probably most of them in the anthology ("almanac") format of three short films packaged to run the length of a feature. Further specialization of pro-

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duction is being undertaken by a subdivision of Mosfilm, "Ekran," headed by Samsonov, which will work with the Film Actor's Studio-Theater in making films as vehicles for specific actors.

Less obvious but nonetheless real progress is also taking place in government control and censorship, where there is much more tolerance than heretofore. Plenty of themes that were completely absent from Soviet screens a decade ago, from Stalinist concentration camps and anti-heroes to sex and nudity, are now coming into their own, sometimes even where their connection with the basic plot might seem a bit tenuous. Suffice it here to cite one example of the new administrative tolerance. When one comedy director submitted his new slapstick picture to the Federal Cinema Committee, he received a reply with some polite phrases to the effect that the film was a bit long, and in order to make it more viewable it would be a good idea to cut it down a bit, especially removing two "unnecessary" scenes, one showing college students trying to bamboozle their professor on a final exam, the other a slapstick chase with the bully made up like an African savage. Both scenes stayed in the released film, and both provoked great hilarity among audiences.

Another indication of a broader outlook is the growing number of foreign films released in the USSR (108 in 1965, 100 in 1966), including *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Seduced and Abandoned*, *That Girl Rosemary*, *Some Like It Hot*, three by Soviet favorite Stanley Kramer (*Defiant Ones*; *Judgment at Nuremberg*; *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World*), even such older works as *The Outcry (Il grido)*, *Umberto D*, and *Rashomon*—whose Soviet premières were in 1965–66. Better late than never. To be sure, a large part of foreign films on Soviet screens are still from the "people's democracies," but even in the new Polish and especially Czech and Hungarian films there is some eye-opening innovation and forthrightness, which is beginning to have its effect. A number of them are drawing the box-office warning "Children under 16 not admitted." Examples are the Bulgarian *One Night of Love*, the Polish *How to Be Loved*, and the spicy Czech boudoir comedy *Story of a Door Key*—which aroused something of a controversy last year when an irate parent and teacher was "so shocked and embarrassed" by it that he wrote *Sovetskoe kino* complaining that "such pictures contradict our moral standards." (A number of replies were later printed, pooh-poohing the old-fashioned ideas of the complainant.)

The increased exhibition of western films has not altered the traditional practice of dubbing them into Russian. Some gripes have been voiced on this score, however, and when *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* opened in Moscow with a Russian narration over the French singing (which as a consequence was toned down to virtual inaudibility), one composer wrote a sharp letter of protest inquiring why subtitles had not been used instead, and why the opening had been cut out (SK 6/18/66).

Things are happening in construction as well as organization. Approval has been given for the construction of a House for Film Veterans (i.e., those who are retired), and for the above-mentioned All-Union Film Center, to be a headquarters for all film research. A considerable number of new theaters are going up every year, which hopefully will permit the eventual retirement of some surviving relics from Tsarist days (like the "Metropole") which are still in operation. One very large one is going up in Moscow on Kalinin Avenue not too far from the "Artistic," and another huge one in the new Russia Hotel; the latter will be the first new theater in the city center in many years. At the end of 1965 Moscow had 101 theater buildings, 71 of them built since 1945; in 1966 seven more were slated to open, with a seating capacity of 5500. In the nation as a whole, the total number of film-showing facilities practically doubled between 1959 and the end of 1965, from 78,000 to 145,300. Included in the latter figure are 10,400 wide-screen and 87 "wide-format" (70mm or Cinerama) theaters.

A serious problem has always been the relatively limited film exhibition in rural areas of the USSR where, unlike the USA, private cars are practically nonexistent. Attendance statistics indicate that the average city-dweller sees 20.6 films per year, the average country-dweller 15.7 (1964 data). This inequity may be partially eliminated by a new invention, the filmobile, which is being given a tryout in White Russia. These are busses with 35–60 seats, which make a circuit of villages within a radius of six to ten miles picking up customers until the bus is full: then they stop to show the film program, and finally drive the customers back to their homes. As a reflection of all these measures to build more theaters, increase rural service, etc., plus the normal growth of population, attendance in Soviet film theaters has risen steadily in the 1960's, from 3,611,000,000 in 1960 to 3,877,000,000 in 1963 and 4,112,000,000 in 1964. The average number of visits to theaters per person



in 1964 was 18.3 (combining urban and rural data), which Soviet statisticians compare with a figure of 12 in the USA and 8 in England and France.

Soviet television has always been a poor relation of films, in terms of critical recognition, extent of operations, and size of audience. Within the past few years, however, *Iskusstvo kino* has begun carrying a regular television section, and important directors like Alexandrov and Alov-Naumov have done feature films for the small screen (called the "light-blue screen" in Russia). As in the film society movement, Poland and Czechoslovakia seem to have developed TV faster, and the USSR is seeing what useful experience can be gained from the Poles and Czechs. But the Soviets hope to take a big step forward with the planned opening on November 7, 1967 (fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution) of the largest telecasting center in Europe, going up in the Ostankino district of northern Moscow. At first, four black-and-white channels will be in operation, with the center's total capacity of seven channels (including some color) to be reached around 1970.

This is a very encouraging development which should considerably expand the viewing possibilities of people in the USSR, but one which may be running toward a conflict with the construction of so many new theaters. In the large urban areas, such as the capital, most of the impressive new buildings are being put up in the suburbs, where the populations are rapidly expanding in newly built residential complexes of apartment houses, stores, and so on. But a rather familiar question faces these brand-new theaters: will they be able to recoup their construction costs before the citizenry of their neighborhoods gets enough free television at home that it will decide to watch the small screen instead? (While in the USSR, I talked to more than one taxi-driver who could say very little about current films because he "spent his spare time in the summer either outdoors or watching TV.") If the central government agency for film distribution has in the past pegged its plans to 90% of theater capacity, these might have to undergo some revision as Soviet television expands its operations. In any event, let us wish a policy of "peaceful coexistence" to Soviet cinema and television, and hope that the former will be able to avoid some of the temporary devastation wreaked on the American film industry by television some fifteen years ago.

To wind up this survey of the Soviet film industry, something must be said about the films themselves. There is considerable promise of interesting things completed and in progress, in a variety of genres and styles. In the recently rehabilitated "action" genres, we find rather mediocre pictures like the detective story *Black Business* (Hathaway-style semidocumentary based on a true crime story of the "knitted goods gang"), *Extraordinary Mission* (a cloak-and-dagger yarn set in the Russian civil war period, with feats of daring, narrow escapes, etc.), and *What are You Called Now* (Soviet agent, operating in disguise behind Nazi lines, faces brilliant German counterspy). Another of the "black" genres, horror, has been completely untapped until two novice directors recently began adapting Gogol's tale of terror and apparitions *The Vii*, with Leonid Kuravlev in the lead role. In science fiction little has been done either, with the recent *Garin's Death Ray* a total critical failure. Let us hope for more from Polish sci-fi writer Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (to be directed by Tarkovsky after finishing *Andrew Rublev*), and from fantasy-comedies like Siegel's *Gray Disease* (a professor isolates the bacillus which is discovered to be the cause of indifference, and injects himself as an experiment) and *Formula for the Rainbow* (inventor creates a robot to double for him at meetings, but the double begins to take over).

Much greater achievements have occurred in comedy, especially when satiric dialogue is mixed with visual slapstick, as in Riazanov's *Look Out for Cars* (also known as *An Unusual Thief*, with Shakespearean star Smoktunovsky as a Soviet Robin Hood stealing from the rich and giving to the poor), and in Gaidai's color slapstick grotesques like *Barbos the Dog* and *The Unusual Chase*, *The Moonshiners*, and the fabulous *Operation Laughter and Other Adventures of Shurik* (featuring Gaidai's three fumbling crooks, "the Old Master," "the Sissy," and "the Nitwit," patterned after the Lavender Hill Mob and the Three Stooges) filled with matchless sight gags inspired by Chaplin—whose films Gaidai runs off for himself before starting each of his productions. I saw *Operation Laughter* at a sneak preview and found it the funniest Russian visual comedy since Alexandrov's classic *Jolly Fellows* (1934)—an opinion confirmed later, after the film's general release, when it was voted one of the ten best Soviet films of the year. Particularly in the first episode where he stages a 15-minute pantomime fight-chase scene between a huge bully (Alexis Smirnov) and a clever, be-

spectacled little student (Alexander Demianenko), Gaidai reaches heights of visual inventiveness on a level with the best Chaplin-Eric Campbell duels. It will be a crime if Gaidai's virtually dialogueless color comedies do not find American distribution.

Another top young comedy director, Danelia, has done an interesting lyrical, plotless comedy, *Meet Me in Moscow*, with three very appealing young performers who are already stars—Galina Polskikh, Alexis Loktev, and particularly Nikita Mikhalkov (reviewed in *FQ*, Fall '66); he followed this with a more biting satire in the style of Capra: 33, with Eugene Leonov as a hapless little guy discovered to have 33 teeth, who is lionized by a gullible Soviet public in a whirlwind publicity campaign and victimized by publicity seekers, sharp operators, and demagogues. Another important young comedy director, Elem Klimov, made a brilliant first feature, *Welcome Kostia—or, No Trespassing*, a disguised, rather malicious satire on Stalin in the person of a stuffy youth-camp director who is run out by the kids' rebellion; he enjoyed much less success with his second, Volodin's script *Adventures of a Dentist*, a mixture of eccentric humor, songs, and character types. Another much-discussed comedy-fantasy was Mironer's *Lebedev vs. Lebedev*, in which a meek young man visualizes himself accomplishing big things, speaking up in public, saving ladies in distress, but his imagined successes evaporate when he faces the same situations in reality. The rapid development of Soviet comedy, which is taking an increasingly nothing-sacred attitude, is further signalled by the current production of *Zhenia, Zhenechka, and "Katiusha,"* written by the pop singer Bulat Okujava, a comedy about World War II—which has usually been a subject for ultraserious treatment.

It is interesting to note that more sympathy is being shown for nonconformists, outsiders, even jailbirds and anti-Soviet characters. Top actors like Boris Chirkov (as a police stool pigeon in *Extraordinary Mission*), Sergo Zakariadzeh (a grasping kulak in *Two Lives*), and Donatas Banionis (a non-political slob in the prize-winning *Nobody Wanted to Die*) are giving considerable extra dimensions to "negative" roles by portraying them as strong, rounded, individual characters. A different type of casting against type produced a great success for Anatole Papanov in *The Living and the Dead* (Simonov's big anti-Stalin war novel) when this villain specialist for the first time played a heroic character, a general freed from a political prison

to command an expendable front against the Germans. Two other films focussing on jailbirds which made a big mark were *Believe Me Folks* (written by novelist Yuri Herman), about an ex-con and repeat offender (theft) who can't go straight because no one will trust him, and the highly controversial *Your Son and Brother* (written and directed by Shukshin), sympathetically portraying a happy-go-lucky lad—played by the very popular Kuravlev—who breaks out of prison just to visit his folks in the country, and is caught and taken back again.

The other side of the coin in the new tendency toward "equalized characterization" is to tear down civil leaders and party members—who appear to be model citizens at the start, but whose pettiness of soul and lack of understanding and tolerance is gradually unmasked in the course of personal, romantic, and sex conflicts. An example is *Descent into the Taiga*, where the ostensibly upstanding Comsomol expedition leader comes out worse than the expedition's black sheep, a disreputable, scoffing cynic. This approach is even more striking when applied to female characters in two films by fast-rising sophomore directors: the lady school principal in Shepitko's *Wings*, the lady kolkhoz chairman in Liubimov's *The Women*—both of whom come into conflict with the younger generation, and whose moral rigidity and impersonal approach to their work greatly tarnishes their MOTHER image.

The much-discussed *Wings* ends with the school principal going up in a plane, with the possibility that she may crash it deliberately to end her fouled-up life. But Shepitko leaves us in doubt as to the outcome, and this allowing the audience to think along with the characters and to draw its own conclusions is another characteristic of the modernist style in Soviet cinema. Hutsiyev's *I am Twenty* and his forthcoming *July Rain* both closely resemble Antonioni in recounting apparently rambling, meaningless episodes from the lives of confused members of the generation of the 1960's—the first Soviet generation which can afford the luxury of doubt, of contradictions, of asking questions without being able to answer them. Michael Romm, in fact, characterizes his new productions as "reflective" or "meditative" films, where problems are only raised, but not solved.

Writer-director-actor Shukshin uses the same approach in his beloved rural settings in his first two features, *A Fellow Like That* and *Your Son and Brother* (both starring Kuravlev, a kind of rustic



A DAY OF HAPPINESS

Soviet Belmondo), as does veteran Chekhov specialist Joseph Heifitz in his fascinating *Day of Happiness* (which is really his *Lady with the Dog* done in a modern Leningrad setting, starring Semina as the straying wife and Batalov again as the other man) and, presumably, also in Heifitz's forthcoming *In the Town of S.* (from Chekhov's *Ionych*, with Papanov as the idealist who goes to pot and Andrew Popov in an added role as Chekhov himself). Such devices, harking back to the type of "emotional scenario" which Rzheshesky was trying to write for Pudovkin and Eisenstein in the early 1930's before "socialist realism" took over, can be carried too far, however; compare Sakharov and Bela Akhmadulina's poetic, chronologically disorganized *Clean Ponds*, which was harshly criticized for a lack of proportion and value: the characters' fragmented thoughts and reminiscences treat petty love affairs as no less important than World War II.

Film-makers like Heifitz and Hutsiyev dwell on a favorite Chekhov theme, the impossibility of communication between friends, lovers, spouses, parents, and children—the theme is not new, but the admission that it can happen in modern Soviet society is. A Chekhovian picture of this type is *Bridge Under Construction*, directed by the theatrical master Oleg Efremov, with his "Contemporary" troupe playing all the parts (one of the few times since Welles's *Kane* that a stage company was brought en masse to do a film). Along with non-communication, some of the new pictures, like Vengerov's *Factory Town*, show considerable interest in the seamy side of life (*bytopisatel'stvo*—cf. Italian neorealism, British kitchen-sink drama): trivial, unattractive aspects of the characters' pri-

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vate lives such as dirt and disrepair, drunkenness, nagging quarrels, broken homes, religious sects, etc.

Carrying this a step further into naturalism (once a taboo style) are Zhalakiavichius in the Hemingway-like *Nobody Wanted to Die* (officially voted best Soviet film of 1966) and Konchalovsky in *First Teacher*, raw treatments of unrefined, crude heroes involved in considerable blood and suffering—beatings, rapes, killings of people and animals. Back in 1964 Vladimir Fetin set something of a precedent for this style with his second Sholokhov adaptation about the raw Russian Civil War days, *Tale of the Don*, which was a critical and popular success for its combination of fine acting (Leonov, Liudmila Chursina), brutality and killing, plus plenty of sex and not a little nudity. Sex seems definitely to be on its way in, judging from *Tale of the Don* and modern problem dramas like *A Boy and a Girl* (written by Panova) and *The Women*, whose heroines are teen-age girls abandoned by their boy friends when they become pregnant. *The Women* was criticized, like Godard's *The Married Woman*, because its title implies too much generality for the particular sex drama it depicts; but it was a box-office smash, playing to sold-out houses for a full week in places. And a little nudity is used to good advantage not only in modern dramas like the Georgian *Hello It's Me* (the striking debut of Margaret Terekhova), but even in historical pictures like *The First Russians* (written by Olga Bergholtz), Tarkovsky's long-awaited *Andrew Rublev*, and Serge Parajanov's sensational *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*.

Much has already been written about the latter film, whose pictorial compositions, imaginative color, visual and musical ethnic background detail, and romanticized story (properly spiced with Tattiana Bestayeva's nude scene) have won it attention at numerous festivals, after Parajanov (born 1924) had spent an entire decade directing at the Ukrainian studio without showing any of the talent finally revealed in *Ancestors*. For this reason let us hope that we can expect even more from *Andrew Rublev*, Tarkovsky's forthcoming second feature, considering that Tarkovsky began with the unforgettable *My Name is Ivan*—which is much closer to Polanski and the psychological *film noir* than to a standard Soviet war movie, despite the critics. Tarkovsky picked a provincial actor named Solonitsyn to play Rublev, the medieval monk who created some of the world's most beautiful religious art, and also has in his cast the now teen-aged Kolja Burliayev (from *My Name is Ivan*). Tarkovsky has

been quoted that he wants his two-part *Rublev* (co-written by Konchalovsky) to be a psychological study of the process of creation, and of purification through suffering; if this young master continues to develop the psychological penetration and camera brilliance of *My Name is Ivan*, his *Rublev* could be the most artistic Soviet film in years.

But it will not be easy to surpass what strikes me as the most brilliant Soviet film since the 1920's: Michael Kalatozov's artistically incredible, thematically controversial, financially disastrous *I am Cuba*, a 1964 co-production made in Cuba, co-written by Evtushenko, photographed by Urusevsky. In this picture Kalatozov and Urusevsky have far surpassed their epoch-making camera innovations of *Cranes are Flying* and *Unsent Letter*, and have realized Eisenstein's dream, which he was trying for in his abortive Mexican film—to give an extremely dynamic, emotional, epic picture of the revolutionary struggle of oppressed Latin American masses, using visual images and no dialogue (an occasional Spanish phrase here and there does not even need to be translated). A year before Yutkevich's more publicized experiment with narrated dialogue in *Lenin in Poland*, Kalatozov and Evtushenko made *I am Cuba* virtually silent, with dramatic music, natural sound, and bits of

Evtushenko's impressionistic poetry introducing each episode and connecting them together. The film also harks back to Eisenstein's silent classics like *Potemkin* and *Strike* and to Kalatozov's own 1930 ethnographic masterpiece *Salt for Svanetia* (North American première at Montreal and New York archival screenings in spring 1966), in showing a generalized, impersonal *mass hero* consisting of nonactor *types* rather than individual characters, in the stylized sort of persuasive, emotional, epic melodrama once known as "agitprop"—before it was rejected by Stalin in favor of prosaic, sentimental, conformist "socialist realism" in the middle 1930's.

Kalatozov and Urusevsky have applied their technique of the "emotional camera" to an extent which has to be seen to be believed, with moving camera and handheld camera (Urusevsky ends one unforgettable scene swimming underwater), wide-angle (9.8mm) lenses, oddly tilted angles which distort the characters' images and give the whole picture a very distinctive form, and some elaborate crane shots—especially one travelling up inside a skyscraper across the roof and then flying out over the street below—which in engineering complexity probably equal anything done by the Germans in the 1920's. The film provoked so much technical admiration in the USSR that the taciturn

TALE OF  
THE DON



Urusevsky, who is probably the greatest active cameraman in the world, was even coaxed into giving a public lecture-discussion (*IK* '66.2:27-37)—although neither he nor Kalatozov ordinarily speaks up in discussions or writes theoretical articles, unlike most Soviet film-makers who are more eloquent behind a typewriter or a rostrum than behind a camera.

*I am Cuba* in two hours and a half tells four separate episodes from the life of pre-Castro Cuba: a Negro prostitute is preyed upon by Ugly American tourists, in an impressionistically sensual episode the likes of which has rarely been seen on the Soviet screen; an old tenant farmer is dispossessed and burns his crops and cabin in a suicidal fury—the inevitable Kalatozov conflagration sequence; a group of student rebels at Havana University are caught by the police and riot against them; and, artistically the weakest episode, a poor peasant family is driven by an accidental Batista aerial bombing into joining the Castro guerrillas, who only in the final minute are shown in an impressionistic montage of a victory procession.

From the standpoint of content, the film met a rather cold reception in Cuba and Eastern Europe (see a series of articles, some highly critical, in *IK* '65.3:24-37) because of an obvious emphasis on art for art's sake, and because it concentrates with barely concealed fascination on the miseries of poor Cubans under Batista. But, after all, such topics as crime, suffering, police brutality, perversions, student demonstrations, a burning field of sugar cane, and violent death under a bourgeois regime can be stimulating—and cinematic—for a film-maker, more so perhaps than the regimented society and dull life to be found under some other government systems. . . . Because of two anti-American elements, this film may not find American distribution, but if the first episode (which is, however, very flashy and very sexy) were omitted, along with one other short scene where a gang of American sailors on a binge try to attack a Cuban co-ed, perhaps this unforgettable masterpiece could be seen in America—even if it were in truncated form.

## Film Reviews

### PERSONA

Script and direction: Ingmar Bergman. Photography: Sven Nykvist. Editing: Ulla Rygge. Music: Lars Johan Werle. Production: Svensk Filmindustri. Distribution: Lopert Films.

Ingmar Bergman's films are a perverse kind of Pearl White serial of the intellect. The characters and themes scrutinized and seemingly resolved in one episode are challenged in another. Thus, the performers of *The Naked Night* were reprieved, by an absurd deus-ex-machina device, in *The Magician*. The father's facile homily at the conclusion of *Through a Glass Darkly*, that God is love and love proves God's existence, was mocked in *Winter Light*. And the vibrant young wife of *The Seventh Seal*, who escaped death by believing that "it's always better when one is two," finds her cozy philosophy tested beyond its, or her, endurance when she is placed in the terrifying position of being

alone in the presence of another person, and the two become one, in *Persona*.

The other person is an actress, Elizabeth Vogler, who stopped playing her role in mid-performance one evening, and has been silent since. She can be humanly moved—but not by acting. When she hears another actress sincerely intoning the words "Forgive me!" she breaks into silent laughter. For her, all acting is lying and, by extension, every action is a lie. She has decided that there is little difference between existentially performing an "action" and theatrically "performing" an action. It's difficult to tell the truth—and it's so easy, so generous, so human to lie. Truth wounds; lies soothe. People love to be complimented, to be lied to. Granting this, we imagine the actress asking herself, how can I stop lying? The answer: stop speaking. And what act is not a lie? The act of suicide, and the sight of a monk's